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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003137

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IR I2

SUBJECT: SADRIST TREND LEADER DISCUSSES POLITICAL, SECURITY  
SITUATION IN WASIT

Classified By: John Underriner, A/OPA Director, for reasons 1 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

¶2. (S) SUMMARY: PRTOFF met with Sadr Trend leader Achmed Hussein Aberah on November 24 in al-Kut. Aberah, the primary organizer of the Sadr Trend primary election in Wasit, described the high-turnout and "transparency" of the election, crediting Moqtada al-Sadr for the concept and general plan. Approximately 30,000 people had participated, including many independents, he claimed. He decried the Nov. 22 sniper attack on a Wasit PRT mission which killed an American soldier and said the Sadr Trend political movement had little control of or influence over Jaysh Al Madhi (JAM) cells likely responsible. Aberah opined that the dismissal of former police chief Ra'ad Shakir Jawdat had led to a deterioration of security in Wasit. Finally, he suggested the possibility of Iraqi Police (IP) complicity in the attack since US military movements are coordinated with IP counterparts. END SUMMARY.

FRANK TALK ABOUT SADRISTS IN WASIT

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¶3. (C) PRTOFF met with Achmed Hussein Aberah on Nov. 24 in al-Kut. Aberah is an activist in Wasit's Sadr Trend Party and was responsible for organizing the recent Sadr Trend primary election in the governorate. He was at pains to emphasize that the meeting with PRTOFF did not constitute "engagement" with coalition forces, but spoke frankly about Sadr Trend politics, the PRT's mission, and threats to coalition forces. Aberah credited Moqtada al-Sadr with the idea for the primary election. He said that Moqtada had urged that the process be as transparent as possible, and that the Sadr Trend leader wanted "fresh voices" to join the Sadr Trend leadership in order to strengthen the political movement. The Sadrists had expected 2,000 to 3,000 people to vote in the primaries, but approximately 30,000 had participated across Wasit, Aberah claimed. Any registered voter was eligible to participate, and Aberah believed a significant number of primary voters were not active Sadrists, but interested "independents," a boon for the Sadr Trend movement. Aberah provided a list of candidates for the Council of Representatives (CoR) selected through the primary and said they would appear on the party list in the same order they were chosen by voters (controlled for adequate female representation). He also made positive remarks about Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) assistance with the primary.

MEETING FOLLOWED DEATH OF US SOLDIER

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¶4. (S) The meeting with Aberah occurred two days after a PRT mission in an-Numaniyah was attacked by a sniper, resulting in the death of a U.S. soldier assigned to the PRT's movement protection. Aberah was unaware of the incident. When asked who was responsible for the attack and why coalition forces

in general, and the PRT in particular, had again become targets after a period of relative quiet, he suggested certain militia elements were becoming active again in an attempt to affect the elections. He claimed Moqtada al-Sadr did not approve of such attacks. Aberah said that it was understood within the Sadrist ranks that the PRT was "neutral", and engaged in reconstruction and humanitarian work; hence he was willing to meet with Wasit PRT. However, he suggested weak discipline in militia ranks and an inability of the political wing to control certain JAM fighters.

SADRIST TREND ACTIVIST: "DETERIORATION OF SECURITY"

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15. (S) Pressed further, Aberah posed a question to PRTOFF: who knew about the PRT's movements and appointments on the day in question? Aberah opined that the precision attack was not random or opportunistic, but probably an arranged hit. He then went on to say that in the wake of Provincial Director of Police General Ra'ad Shakir Jawdat's dismissal, security in the province had deteriorated. He said that Ra'ad had a "personal" intelligence network that functioned well and broke up insurgent cells before attacks occurred, Aberah asserted. The "official" intel service was less competent and compromised. There were insufficient IP assets dedicated to Numaniyah, and IP discipline was more lax than under Ra'ad. Aberah said that coalition forces should press these points with provincial officials if they wished to prevent further attacks. For his part, he expressed regret for the incident and said that the Sadrist Trend political movement would be "saddened and disappointed" by another

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violent attack. PRTOFF urged Aberah to emphasize the nature of the PRT's mission throughout the Sadrist ranks, and said that the tragedy's ultimate losers were the people of Numaniyah who might find themselves without PRT assistance because of JAM violence.

COMMENT: IP ROLE IN SHOOTING?

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16. (S) The implication of Aberah's rhetorical question and surprising comments about Ra'ad were that the IP may have passed information on PRT movements to JAM. (NOTE: The IP escort scheduled for this movement did not show up. RSO is investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident to ascertain whether sensitive information was provided to individuals who may have facilitated the attack. END NOTE) Ra'ad was a thorn in JAM's side during his tenure in Wasit and was unpopular within the IP ranks for purging incompetent or possibly compromised personnel. Aberah was also trying to make a clear distinction between the movement's political wing and the militias. He appeared concerned that the attack might alter the posture of coalition forces in the area and possibly, in conjunction with other attacks and electoral uncertainty, alter the U.S. withdrawal timeline.

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